

MSAN 610 - Meetup

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On August 25th, we went to the *GraphQL in Production* meetup in San Francisco. GraphQL is a data query language developed by Facebook in 2012 in order to request and deliver data to mobile and web apps. Facebook needed a querying language that was simple yet powerful in order to be effective at the scale of the billion+ users in the network. GraphQL is in the process of being open-sourced, and many talks are being held in order to garner new users of this growing platform.

What did we do well? What could we have done better?

Arda

Arda first approached Alex, who turned out to be the manager of the GraphQL team at Facebook. While the initial introduction was fine, at a point it became clear that Arda did not have the knowledge base to converse with Alex for an extended period of time. He did a good job of consistently asking questions and showing a personal interest in Alex's background, but this did not fully compensate for their difference in domain knowledge.

Shortly after talking with Alex, Arda introduced himself to Matt, who recently joined a small start-up called Captain401. Their chat was much more equal and natural, since Matt was not very familiar with GraphQL either. Once again Arda did a very good job of being personable, learning more about Matt's background, reason for joining his current company, and experience as a newcomer to San Francisco. They talked for almost 15 minutes, only stopping to make sure everyone could get seats for the talk.

Andre During the socializing before the talks, Andre spoke to Matt, a software engineer in the GraphQL team at Facebook. After the talks, he talked to Geoff Schmidt, CEO and co-founder of Meteor (where the meetup took place). In both exchanges, Andre managed to introduce himself well, stating clearly that he was a student at USF interested in the new technologies that are being used in the industry. He smiled, maintained eye-contact with the people he was talking to, and managed to keep the conversation going by asking some relevant questions about the subjects being discussed. However, one thing he can do better is to talk louder and more articulately. Indeed, on two occasions, he was asked to repeat his question. It is

often the case that these meetups are loud and messy environments, so it is important to be aware if one is speaking too softly or mumbling up some words.

Roger The first person that Roger spoke to was Praveen, a freelance software engineer. This conversation went well with both members showing interest and enthusiasm. Roger showed interest in Praveen's background as he continuously asked questions about his work. The conversation felt balanced with both members asking and answering questions equally. One thing that Roger could work on was the closing of the conversation. It felt a bit awkward and forced when the conversation ended. Roger could work on having a "go-to" line to politely end the conversation.

The second person that Roger met was Hyo, a software engineer on the GraphQL team at Facebook. The initial conversation started off well with both members asking about each other's background. However, later on, Roger struggled to keep the conversation going. He hesitated several times because he could not quickly come up with a follow-up question or comment. This time Roger ended the conversation better by politely thanking Hyo for his time.

If we could do it all over, what would we do differently?

Arda If I could do it all over, I would have done more research about GraphQL prior to the meetup. While there is no way I would know enough to truly hold my own when talking to someone like Alex, at least I would have been able to ask more insightful questions. Another thing I would improve is my elevator pitch and pitch delivery. I naturally prefer asking questions to answering them, but by having a better pitch it would help balance conversations with more knowledgeable meetup-goers.

Andre If I could do it all over, I would be more assertive about what interests me in Data Science and Analytics. I know that this will come gradually as we have more and more courses on different subjects, but I feel that having more knowledge on the specific tools being used will help me maintain the conversation going for longer, by being able to understand and ask more insightful questions to the people I am talking to. I will also make an effort to enunciate better and speak louder, so that people don't need to ask me to repeat what I just said.

Roger If I could do it all over, I would have been more brave and approached people earlier. I was a bit nervous and did not get a chance to talk to anyone before the presentations started. Since it was getting

late, most of the audience had left after the presentations. This resulted in my first conversation being a bit rushed because I wanted to mingle with two people before the event was over. Also, I would avoid asking technical questions. I asked Hyo (the presenter) about how GraphQL works and he rambled on with too many technical details that went over my head.

The content of the talks

At this meetup, four talks were scheduled for the evening. All of these talks were intended for software engineers, particularly those who are familiar with GraphQL.

First, Nick Nance from Credit Karma spoke about managing GraphQL at scale. He explained how shifting to GraphQL makes the back-end and front-end developing easier than using previous tools. Aside from one low-quality screenshot of a terminal in his slides, Nick's talk was made to the right audience, with good intention, and using the right medium. His presentation style was not the most exciting and could have used more varied intonation, but he did a good job of asking questions to the crowd so that they stayed engaged.

Second, Hyo Jeong, the main developer behind GraphQL at Facebook, gave a talk focusing on GraphiQL, an in-browser IDE for managing GraphQL that he is currently developing. Hyo was very comfortable on stage, smiling and laughing as he went along his slides, which were clean and concise. Although he had a slight hiccup at first with a live demo of GraphiQL, the presentation was great. This was in part due to how evident his excitement about his work was, as well as his consistent smile.

Third, the co-founders of Scaphold.io, Michael Paris and Vince Ning took the stage to talk about how they use GraphQL as a service on their website, which helps build scalable apps with this new tool. Although their talk was interesting and they knew what they wanted to say and to whom, the live demo they had planned did not work at all. In addition, the projection was not zoomed-in enough for the audience to be able to see what was on the screen. We feel that they failed on the medium. The speakers were loud and clear, but whenever one of them wasn't speaking they stood around rather awkwardly.

Finally, Rohit Bakhshi, Product Manager at Meteor, gave the last talk of the night on how using GraphQL improves front-end performance and increases developer productivity since it is so easy to implement and yet so powerful. However, his talk was the weakest of the four, failing to captivate the audience (maybe because he was the last one to present), and the intention was not exactly clear to us. In addition, his live demo was not zoomed-in enough, and he failed to understand when the audience asked him to "make it bigger".